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## A Comparative Study of The Prayer of Gethsemane

Craig A Smith

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For years scholars have observed that there are many differences and similarities between the parallel Synoptic passages in terms of content and structure. It is this writer's premise that the differences between the parallel passages (e.g. omission or addition of material; substitutions of text; differences in vocabulary) provide the key to unlocking the theological purposes of the respective gospel writers. In this article the writer examines the differences in the parallel accounts of the Prayer of Gethsemane in order to show the distinctiveness of each author's theological purpose.

### Introduction

All three Synoptics contain the Prayer of Gethsemane<sup>1</sup> [Mt 26:36-46; Mk 14:32-42; Lk 22:39-46]. An initial reading of the three texts shows that Matthew and Mark are closely related in terms of content and structure. Luke, on the other hand, follows the structure of Mark and to a lesser degree Mark's vocabulary until the end of the first 'return to the sleeping disciples' and after that Luke is significantly different from Matthew and Mark in that he omits the remainder of the Gethsemane account found in Mark and Matthew. In spite of the close relationship between Matthew and Mark, there are several points of deviation. Namely, at certain points Matthew omits material included in Mark [e.g. πάντα δυνατά σοι; Mk 14:36] but in others Matthew adds material not included in Mark [e.g. εἰ οὐ δύναται τοῦτο παρελθεῖν ἐὰν μὴ; αὐτὸ; πῶ, γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου; Mt 26:42] yet in others Matthew makes substitutions for the Markan text [e.g. Mt 26:37 τοὺς δύο υἱοὺς Ζεβεδαίου for τὸν

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<sup>1</sup> The historicity of this event has been challenged. Bultmann, for example, considers this pericope as "an individual story of a thorough-going legendary character which has not survived intact in Mark" [Bultmann, *Synoptic*, 267-68]. Cranfield, however, astutely points out it is doubtful that the Early Church would create such a debilitating picture of Jesus.

Ἰάκωβον καὶ [τὸν] Ἰωάννην in Mk 14:33]. It is my thesis that these very differences are the clues to discovering the theological purposes of the respective gospel writers. Thus my intention in this paper is not to determine the underlying sources<sup>2</sup> for each of the writers<sup>3</sup>. Rather my purpose is to show that the distinct theological purpose of the respective writers of each gospel is determined through examining the differences between the texts.

## Withdrawal to Gethsemane

The narrative begins with Jesus going with all the disciples<sup>4</sup> to the strategic location of Gethsemane<sup>5</sup>, found on the Mount of Olives (εἰς τὸ ὄρος τῶν ἐλαιῶν in Mk14:26). Only Luke says it was customary, κατὰ τὸ ἔθος, for Jesus and His disciples to retreat to Gethsemane with His disciples, probably to receive a private

<sup>2</sup> The possibilities for source are varied and include i) Mk. 14:32-42 as one complete unit upon which the Matthew and Luke depend ii) K.G. Kuhn's position of two sources combined in Mk. 14:32-42; iii) independent tradition of Luke iv) Hebrews 5:7-8 is considered to be a reference to Gethsemane and thus another early tradition upon which they are drawing v) a Johannine tradition centered around the use of "hour" (Jn. 12:27ff) and "cup" ( Jn. 18:11). See Barbour, "Gethsemane" 232..

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent overview of the Synoptic Problem and solutions see Bellenzoni, A.J. *The Two Source Hypothesis*; 3-19.

<sup>4</sup> The usage of "disciples" for all three evangelists means the "eleven". None of synoptics includes Judas' previous departure at the Last Supper [c.f. John 13:30 who includes Judas leaving]. They only include his arrival at Gethsemane with the soldiers and Jewish officials.

<sup>5</sup> Gethsemane is a transliteration of the Hebrew and means "oil press". This suggests that where the disciples met was an olive orchard and not the traditional idea of garden [c.f. usage of κήπος, "garden" in Jn 18:1,20; Hagner *Matthew* p.782]. For a different meaning but same idea, see Lachs, *Rabbinic* p.414 where he translates it "oil plots". Gethsemane was the site of significant events in Jesus' ministry; His triumphal entry [Mk 11:1]; His lament over; Jerusalem [Lk 19:29-44]; His teaching about the temple's doom [Mt 24:1-3; Mk 13:1-4]; His arrest [Mk 14:43] and ascension [Lk 24:50-51].



teaching [Mt 24:3] or to sleep after a day of teaching in the Temple [c.f. Lk 21:37]. Early church tradition concurs [Jn 18:2].

The traditions differ concerning “how Jesus arrives”<sup>6</sup>. Matthew depicts Christ leading the way and taking His disciples to be “with Him”<sup>7</sup>. This reflects Jesus’ hope for solidarity that His disciples will “wait and watch with Him” [Mt 26:38] but as the story sadly unfolds they fail [Mt 26:40]. This is a stark contrast to Christ’s character who, as Immanuel [‘God with us’], faithfully abides and watches over His disciples. Luke changes to the passive verb ἐπορεύθη. This may be a veiled reference to death [c.f. Lk 22:22 for the same meaning] since the real struggle takes place in Gethsemane not on the Cross. Here Jesus really dies to His will. For this reason Luke adds the angel account since Jesus needs angelic help when His friends fail Him by sleeping ‘because of grief’ (Lk 22:45). Jesus is also singled out and given centre stage to emphasise His initiative [so Marshall, Luke, 829] but more than that He becomes the paradigm of prayer particularly amidst temptation. Luke’s addition of ἡκολούθησαν δὲ αὐτῷ καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ further supports this pedagogical purpose [contra Nolland, Luke, 1083]. Mark, does not single out Jesus but has them come as a group.

Jesus commands His disciples to sit<sup>8</sup> while He prays. The same rare phraseology of Καθίσατε αὐτοῦ, in Matthew [Mt 26:36], for Mark’s Καθίσατε ὧδε [Mk 14:32], is found in Gen 22:5. This has led Sabourin to conclude this is a “subtle pointer to Gen 22:5” [Matthew, 875], in which Abraham tells his servants to wait while he and Isaac worship and later return. According to him, “the similarity of the situations is suggestive, and their connection may have been intended: Jesus goes to his passion as Isaac to his

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<sup>6</sup> The verbs used are ἔρχεται μετ’ αὐτῶν, ἔρχονται and ἐπορεύθη by Matthew, Mark and Luke respectively.

<sup>7</sup> This phrase is used three times in the passage, Mt 26:36,38,40.

<sup>8</sup> This reference to sitting on the ground may be an Old Testament reference, to abasement or humiliation [Is. 47:1] in order to learn a lesson [Lk. 10:39] so that later they will be lifted up and receive their place of honour [Eph. 2:6, Matt. 19:28, Mk. 10:37-40].

sacrifice" [Matthew, 875]. But unlike the Abraham incident God does not hold back the knife (i.e. death) from Jesus. Stanley, an earlier proponent of this position, finds there is a connection here with the "Son of Abraham" reference in the genealogy in Mt 1:1. Jesus is the *true* Son of Abraham, not Isaac, since He is the obedient son to the father's will and gives His life willingly. By doing so He legitimates His position as the true Son of God [c.f. Heb 5:8; 10:5-10]. Jesus, as the true Son of Abraham, would confirm Matthew's OT fulfilment theme through typology [c.f. Mt 1:23; 2:5; 8:17; 12:17-21].

It is only Luke who tells the disciples what they are to pray while He goes off with the three disciples. The content of the prayer, Προσεύχεσθε μὴ εἰσελθεῖν εἰς πειρασμόν, is again repeated in Lk 22:46 (with a small morphological change to the verb εἰσερχομαι) and provides the outer brackets for the chiasm found in Luke's prayer<sup>9</sup>. Deliverance from temptation echoes back to Jesus' words

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<sup>9</sup> For further discussion see Nolland [*Luke*, 1081]. The following is my delineation of the chiasm. The natural symmetry suggests that verses 43-44 were a later addition to the original oral form. The external evidence weighs slightly in favour of their exclusion [P<sup>75</sup>, κ<sup>a</sup>]. The internal evidence is inconclusive, since the angel visit and agony of Christ could easily be Luke's addition to the pericope to accentuate Christ's struggle, who had little concern for maintaining the original structure. In fact it could be this very awkwardness which Luke used in order to highlight Christ's struggle. Reservedly I omit the verses. Nevertheless Luke's intention, to have Christ as the paradigm for prayer remains. The important issue is submission of the personal will to God.

prayer for deliverance from temptation [40]

movement from disciples [41a]

approach to prayer: kneeling [41b]

paradigm of prayer of submission amidst temptation [42]

approach from prayer: rising [45a]

movement toward disciples [45b]

prayer for deliverance from temptation [45c-46]



concerning prayer [11:4]. Jesus urges them to pray that prayer now in light of the impending crisis. Matthew and Mark, though omit this prayer now, do in fact pick up this same theme later in the story [Mt 26:41; Mk 14:38].

Through the common word, παραλαμβάνω, Matthew and Mark shift scenes [Mt 26:37; Mk 14:33], from Jesus with the eleven disciples to Jesus with the three disciples [Peter, James and John]. Luke omits this reference and has Jesus praying alone. There are two reasons for this omission. First, Luke wants to show his readers that temptation is often suffered alone since people will be consumed with their own grief [Lk 22:45]. Second, he shows the need to be alone in prayer because prayer is the means through which one overcomes temptation by submitting to God's will and receiving His sustaining power. But what is the significance of the inclusion of the disciples for Mark? William Lane believes they were selected because of their glibly expressed confidence to follow God<sup>10</sup> so that Christ might show them discipleship requires steadfast, obedient dedication [Mark, 515-16]. Barbour contends that when these three are with Jesus [5:37; 9:2; 13:3] there is a reference to the parousia [*Gethsemane*, 236]. There is some truth to this thesis, yet more often these references usually point to some characteristic of the Son of Man inherent in His identity; authority over the hostile force of death [5:37] or a demonstration of His power which substantiates His Messianic kingdom call [9:2]. The traditional position is that Jesus brought them for His sake because He needed their companionship. Some consider this argument specious since the disciple's inattentive presence only served to heighten Jesus' distress and loneliness. Cranfield proposes that Mark's purpose for his readers was the same as Jesus', namely, He took them along for their sake to witness and know that the Son of Man's identity can only be understood within the context of a Suffering Servant [also Mohn, *Gethsemane*, 204-205]. All the above positions have strengths. In the original Sitz im Leben, Jesus may have brought them for moral support and that may even be a

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<sup>10</sup> Note the brash statements of Peter [14:29,31] and the Sons of Zebedee [10:36-38].



secondary purpose for Mark here. But, because Mark refers to Jesus and the three disciples and he uses the καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς formula<sup>11</sup> then we can conclude Mark has a special teaching about Christ's identity or kingdom. Thus Cranfield's position has the most merit. Matthew's purpose coincides with Mark's. One difference from Mark, is Matthew's reference to the "two sons of Zebedee" as opposed to Mark's more personal "James and John". First, this is due to Matthew's consistent portrayal of Peter as the spokesperson for the group [c.f. Mt 26:40; 16:16]. Second, Matthew's intention is to provide his primarily Jewish audience information about Peter, his life and character [Mt 14:28-31; 16:17-19; 17:24-27] since he was a major personality in founding the Church [Eph 2:20].

Alone with the disciples Jesus shares His emotional struggle, which until this time He has kept under control [Carson, Matthew, 543], and a request. The exact reason for His troubled emotional state is not mentioned in the text, only the extent to which He is struggling, "unto death" [Mt 26:38]. Cullmann believes because Jesus is completely human He is afraid of death since death is the enemy of God and means to be completely forsaken by God<sup>12</sup>. For this reason Jesus is desperately looking for companionship from God [c.f. Mt 27:46] and even the disciples [Cullmann, *Immortalité*, 26-27]. Hagner, on the other hand, believes it is because He is being faced with the reality of having to bear the sin of the world and God's wrath that He is overwhelmed with grief. In this instance it is

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<sup>11</sup>This formula is used when Jesus has something significant to say or to clarify some issue (1:38; 2:25; 3:4; 4:13).

<sup>12</sup> Cullman states "Jésus est si complètement homme qu'il partage la peur naturelle que nous inspire la mort... La mort, pour lui, n'est pas une chose divine...Jésu sait que la mort en elle-même, puis qu'elle est l'ennemie de Dieu, signifie isolement extrême, solitude radicale. Voilà pourquoi il implore Dieu. En présence de la grande ennemie de Dieu, il ne veut pas être seul...Tant qu'il est entre ses mains, il n'est plus entre les mains de Dieu, mais de l'ennemie de Dieu" [*Immortalité*, 26-29].

impossible to separate the two. In fact it is the combined effect of the two which makes the event so terrifying for Christ<sup>13</sup>.

Matthew substitutes λυπεῖσθαι for ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι in Mark's account. This may be intentional because he considered the more intense form found in Mark "to be inappropriate for his representation of Jesus" [so Sabourin, Matthew, 875]. More likely Matthew wanted to strengthen the connection to the cognate Περίλυπος in Mt 26:38 and therefore to the Ps 42:6 quotation. Mark's word, ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι, an intensive form of θαμβεῖσθαι, is exclusively Markan [9:15, 14:33, 16:5,6]. In each case it refers to a person's intense reaction to the presence of God, which is sometimes "wonder" [9:15] but elsewhere "fear or shock" [16:5,6]. It is the latter category which describes Jesus, since He has come face to face with God whose will is that He should die.

It is generally accepted by scholars that Jesus' statement to His disciples, Περίλυπός ἐστιν ἡ ψυχή μου ἕως θανάτου, which is found in Matthew and Mark but omitted in Luke, comes from the OT, but where? Gundry considers it to be a conflation of Ps 42:6 [Περίλυπός ἐστιν ἡ ψυχή] and Jonah 4:9 [ἕως θανάτου]. The latter he believes is included because of Jesus' "known interest in Jonah [Mt 12:39-41; Lk 11:29-30]" and the text's depiction of "extreme grief" [Gundry, Mark, 867]. Ps 42:6 is certainly the source due to the linguistic and thematic parallels. This Lament Psalm [c.f. 43:5] vividly reveals the human struggle of the righteous man who feels isolated and under tremendous pressure from the false accusations of unrighteous men. The Jonah background, though, is spurious. In the original context of Jonah 4:9, the phrase "ἕως θανάτου", shows the extent to which he is angry but also it is a sort of death wish; to paraphrase Jonah, "I'm so angry I wish I were dead". In the Gethsemane passage only the former idea is present. To paraphrase Jesus, it says "I am grieving in my soul to the point I feel like I am

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<sup>13</sup> Lane correctly recognizes Jesus' distress "is not an expression of fear before a dark destiny nor a shrinking from the prospect of physical suffering and death. It is, rather, horror of the one who lives wholly for the Father at the prospect of the alienation from God which entailed in the judgment upon sin which Jesus assumes" [Mark, 516].



dying” not “I am grieving so much I wish I were dead”. Clearly in this passage the converse is true. Jesus wants to live, death is His choice only because God’s will supersedes His own. Therefore it is either a creation of Mark or “merely a reflection of the OT-tinged language which Jesus used” [Moo, *Use of OT*, 241].

Before separating Himself to pray, Jesus leaves the three disciples with a twofold request, μείνατε ὧδε καὶ γρηγορεῖτε. The emphasis is on the latter since only this request of the two is subsequently repeated by Jesus [Mt 26:41; Mk 14:38]. Both Matthew and Mark use this word only in their respective eschatological discourses [Mk 14:34,35,37; Mt 24:42,43; 25:13] and here in the Gethsemane passage. One option is that this is simply a request “to protect Him from intrusion in His deep anguish<sup>14</sup>” [Moo, *The Use of OT*, 241]. A more likely meaning is “moral preparedness”. This is consistent with Mark and Matthew’s previous usage in the Olivet Discourse (Mk 13:34,35,37; Mt 24:42,43) and other NT writers [c.f. 1 Thess 5:6; 1 Cor 16:13; Col 4:2; 1 Pet 5:8]. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus calls on believers to be prepared for His return through consistently remaining steadfast in the face of temptation and trial [Mk 13:9-13]. Therefore Jesus is calling them to a life of moral preparedness, which in light of 1 Thess 5:6,8 means living a life of love, faith and hope. Their response to Jesus’ arrest and death confirms that they are not ready. In fact it is only because earlier Jesus had been watching and praying for them [Lk 22:31-32] and even now is praying for them [c.f. Jn 17] that they will one day return to God and understand who Jesus is and what is the nature of the Kingdom of God. For this reason, finding a parallel between this Passover night and the one in Ex 12:42 is legitimate. Just as “the Lord kept vigil that night to bring [Israel] out of Egypt” likewise Jesus is keeping vigil to bring them out of darkness and into the Kingdom of God [see Hagner, Matthew, 783].

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<sup>14</sup> Gundry spells out this thought in greater detail: in the same way they are to be alert for Jesus’ return, likewise Jesus is asking the disciples to remain awake to await Judas’ return so that Jesus can “give Himself entirely to praying through His emotional distress” [Mark, 854].

## Jesus' Prayer

Mark<sup>15</sup> pictures Jesus praying three times [1:35, 6:46, 14:32]. In each situation the setting is similar; He prays alone, at night time, amidst an air of demonic oppression. Each time Jesus prays alone, it marks a significant point in Jesus' ministry<sup>16</sup>, after a time of busy stressful activity or before entering another one. It seems tacitly understood that Christ is seeking the refreshing solitude and communion with His Father. Gethsemane is no exception. In the evening air, there is a surreptitious evil looming, Christ is alone preparing for the most painful moment in His life, namely His death for humankind.

The scene changes again. Jesus further separates Himself<sup>17</sup> by walking just ahead of the three disciples, falling to the ground in order to pray. We the readers are permitted to listen into the prayer of Jesus at this most sacred moment. Both Matthew and Mark's account state the distance is μικρὸν, probably to dismiss any objection that the disciples could not have known what Jesus prayed. The fact that it was customary for Jews to pray aloud lends

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<sup>15</sup> Matthew only has a parallel to Mk 6:46 and Mk 14:32. Luke has parallels to Mk 1:35 and Mk 14:32.

<sup>16</sup> In Mk. 1:37, Jesus prays alone after a busy schedule in Capernaum and before going on to preach in different places and meet the religious leaders' conflicts [2:1-3:6]. In 6:46, Jesus has just finished feeding the 5000 and is preparing to be recognized by the people of Gennesaret and move towards fulfilling His passion prediction [8:31].

<sup>17</sup> Schweizer perceives this act of separation from the disciples as a symbolic act of preparation for "God's action through prayer, or preparing to defend oneself against the coming tempter" [Schweizer, Mark, 312]. Jesus is therefore seeking the nearer presence of the Father. Throughout this scene there is an air of temptation or testing which is often attributed to either the Father or Satan. Barbour wisely points out that the testing is much "too terrible" to be from the Father and does not really fit in the context of Ps. 137:23 where God tests men to determine if they are men of God ["Gethsemane", 246]. It seems the Father allows Satan, though never mentioned, to tempt Jesus to forego the cross in order to permit Jesus the opportunity to accept the Father's plan willingly by seeking the Father's counsel. Therefore, the Father is always Jesus' ally throughout this ordeal, behind the scene, hoping for Jesus' steadfast obedience as a "beloved Son".



further support. But Luke qualifies the distance separating the disciples and Jesus, as a stone's throw. This comment coupled with the Lucan verb ἀπεςπάσθη, "tear away" [Acts 20:30; 21:1] intensifies the idea of isolation in times of temptation and the human struggle involved for Jesus to leave His disciples and to cleave to God whose will is the ultimate letting go of self for others.

The posture of prayer differs in the three accounts. Mark has Jesus falling to the ground, ἐπιπτεν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. Gundry believes this is an act of panic [c.f. Mk 5:22; Lk 5:12; Mt 17:6; 18:26,29] which coincides with having to drink the cup [Mark, 855]. Hooker, suggests it stresses the urgency of the matter [Mark, 348]. Szarek finds a parallel to the necessity of the falling seed to die before it bears fruit [Mk 4:8] and Jesus to die to His will in order to go to the Cross, and also, the handing over of the fruit at harvest [4:29] with Jesus being handed over [for a full rebuttal see Gundry, Mark, 869]. This fanciful argument holds no weight. More likely the falling on the ground signifies for, Mark, the idea of Jesus' humble submission to the Father but for the sake of his primarily Gentile audience he omits any Jewish concepts. In contrast Matthew, who is writing to a Jewish audience, adds that Jesus ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ. This could reflect "awe" in accordance with the Jewish apocalyptic tradition [so Sabourin, Matthew, 876]. More likely it refers to humble submission, translating the Hebrew idiom ויפול אברהם על-פניו [c.f. Abraham falling prostrate before God in Gen 17:3,17]. Luke on the other hand changes Mark's rendition to "θεῖς τὰ γόνατα", a Lucan distinctive [c.f. Acts 7:60; 9:40; 20:36; 21:5]. Instead of the typical posture of standing, it reflects the "urgency and humility" of Jesus in prayer [Marshall, Luke, 830]. The textual changes are minor but the main idea of reverent humble submission before a superior remains and thus provides a paradigm of prayer for Luke's readers.

Mark alone has the clause ἵνα εἰ δυνατόν ἐστὶν παρέλθῃ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἡ ὥρα [Mk 14:35]. The use of ἵνα could be understood in two different ways. It could introduce the discourse, "He prayed, saying..."; or it could give the purpose of His prayer, "He prayed in order that...". The latter interpretation is the more common usage of ἵνα, and accentuates His humanity, struggle and need for help and should be accepted.

Mark uses ὥρα in two ways. First, it can refer simply to time, ὥρας πολλῆς γενομένης [Mk 6:35; 11:11; 15:25]. Second, it designates a specific time or an appointed time, for example, when one is tested [Mk 13:11] or when Christ returns [13:32]. This idea is firmly rooted in the Old Testament tradition of God's sovereignty over time. Yahweh ensures everything in creation takes place at its appointed time<sup>18</sup> [Deut 11:14 God sends the rain; Is 2:12 day for the proud; c.f. Heb 9:27]. This latter interpretation is in Mark's mind. But to what exactly does this hour refer? Because of the parallel structure between 13:35b and 13:36a, Lane equates "hour" and "cup"<sup>19</sup>. According to him "both are metaphors for the passion in its deeper redemptive significance" [Lane, Mark, 517]. Gundry on the other hand perceives a distinction between the two [also Barbour, *Gethsemane*, 232-33] which mark the progression from "betrayal" [i.e. hour] to "death" [i.e. cup]. Lane is closer to the mark since "hour" refers to the whole Passion event, which begins with His arrest [14:41] and ends with His death. The "cup" functions to interpret these events. Though Matthew does not use "hour" at this point of the story, he does refer to "the hour" later in Mt 26:45, in which Jesus says "the hour is near". For Matthew, then, the hour does not begin at Jesus' arrest because at the arrest Jesus says "the hour is near" but "not here". "The hour" then is still to come. Therefore unlike Mark, who considers "the hour" to begin with His arrest, Matthew considers "the hour" to refer specifically to His death on the Cross.

The plea "to take away the cup" is found in the three accounts, though in somewhat varied forms. Each account starts with a reference to Father, a term of endearment, which is magnified with

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<sup>18</sup> For a fuller discussion see ed. Brown, Colin *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3 p.848.

<sup>19</sup> Kuhn's distinguishes between two sources. Source A [14:32,35,40,41] refers to the "hour". Source B [34,36-38, vs.39 is an editorial addition] speaks about the "cup". Source A, he perceives to be Christological and eschatological because of its emphasis on the hour and the betrayal unto sinners. Source B, on the other hand, has a "paranetic" focus. I am indebted to him for recognizing the parallelism and themes but his reconstruction is stretched [Lane, Mark, 517].



Mark's use of Abba<sup>20</sup>. The phrase πάντα δυνατά σοι, omitted in Matthew and Luke, is a recognition of God's authority and power [9:23, 10:27] before making His request παρένεγκε τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο ἀπ' ἐμοῦ. Söding is correct when he recognises that this couplet in Mark, provides the basis by which Jesus can make His request to take the cup away<sup>21</sup>. In Mark and Luke<sup>22</sup>, the imperative [2nd person singular] is addressed to the Father directly creating a sense of urgency and desperateness. In contrast, Matthew uses an imperative [3rd person singular with τὸ ποτήριον the subject] to reduce the harshness of Mark's command to an entreaty. Matthew may have lessened the harshness of Mark's text for the sake of his Jewish audience who would most likely take offence at God being commanded.

What is the meaning of "the cup"? According to Sabourin, the "cup" here refers to Jesus' death as determined by God [Sabourin, Matthew, 748] or "the cross" [so Gundry, Mark, 869]. He believes at the time of Jesus the "cup of death" saying found in the Palestinian Targum [Gen 40:23; Deut 32:1] would have been known [c.f. Martyrdom of Isaiah 5.2 and Martyrdom of Polycarp 14.2 though later]. Furthermore in Mk 10:38, Jesus asks James and John if they can "drink the cup which He will drink?". They say they are

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<sup>20</sup> Abba comes from the Aramaic root אבא. There is no precedent for calling God, "Abba" in Judaism. The closest parallel is Ps 89:27 and the Targum of Mal 2:10. According to Jeremias, this word lies behind every instance of Father uttered in Jesus' prayers [Theology, 65]. This demonstrates Jesus' special relationship with the Father [n.b. "my Father"] and obliterates the commonly held Jewish conception of a transcendent God [Eccl 5:1]. It implies the new manner in which all people in Christ will be able to address God.

<sup>21</sup> "Abba-Anrede und Allmachts-Bekenntnis begründen die Bitte Jesu: παρένεγκε τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο ἀπ' ἐμοῦ [Söding, "Gebet", 89].

<sup>22</sup> In some early manuscripts, the imperative in Lk. 22:42 is exchanged for an infinitive. The text would read "are you willing to remove this cup from me? [so Grundmann] or "if you are willing to remove this cup from me, well and good" [so Marshall, *Luke*, 831] and therefore increases the sense of resignation to the will of God. The external evidence for the infinitival text is weaker than the imperatival text, whether παρένεγκαι [κ] or παρένεγκεῖν [A,W,Ψ]. But the internal evidence favours the infinitival reading because it is the harder reading.

able and Jesus predicts they will. Thus the meanings for “cup”, namely death, must be the same for both Jesus and James and John. In fact this is true. The “cup” for James was death through beheading [Acts 12:2]. But for John, his “cup” was his exile to death on the island of Patmos. Therefore under Sabourin’s position, the “cup” cannot refer to God’s judgment and wrath because that would be assigning to James and John vicarious suffering which clearly their cup does not include. Carson does not aver their position because “the frequent allusions in the passion narrative demand an OT meaning for τὸ ποτήριον” [Matthew, 544; Söding, *Gebet*, 89]. By far the most frequent meaning of this term in the OT is God’s judgment and wrath [Ps 11:6; 75:7-8; Is 51:17]. Therefore the cup here refers to the judgment and wrath of God on humanity which Christ must suffer vicariously for others. But can one apply this meaning to the “cup” which James and John are to drink? Clearly one cannot since their deaths do not effect salvation from sin. Lane has the final word on this issue, because he, rightly, sees that both ideas are present [also Söding, *Gebet*, 89]. On one hand Jesus, James and John share the same cup of suffering<sup>23</sup>, which results in death for being obedient to God’s calling. But on the other hand Jesus’ cup is unique because His cup includes bearing the judgment and wrath of God. This idea is parallel to Mk 10:45. Both Jesus and the disciples are called to serve obediently, even unto death, but only Jesus’ service includes giving His life as a ransom and bearing the wrath of God for all human sin.

All three accounts retain a qualifying statement to the entreaty [Mk 14:36c; Mt 26:39c; Lk 22:42b] conveying the meaning “not my will but your will”. Mark juxtaposes ἐγώ and σύ to emphasise the disparity between what (literally “what thing”, note the use of the neuter demonstrative pronoun τί) the human will wants and the divine will wants. This coincides directly with the contrast later in Mk 14:38 between the flesh and the Spirit. Matthew imports ὥς into the text, from Mt 6:10 in order to contrast the heavenly will [drink the cup] and earthly will [avoid the cup]. Luke follows Matthew’s example using the Lord’s prayer [θέλημά...τὸ σὸν

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<sup>23</sup> Söding calls this the “Leidensbecher des Martyriums” [*Gebet*, 89].

γινέσθω; c.f. Mt 6:10] but substitutes τὸ θέλημα for θέλω. What is clear in all three accounts is Jesus' resolution that the will of the Father supersedes the human will whatever the cost.

One major difficulty in this passage is the seeming confusion surrounding the use of the first class condition “εἰ δυνατόν<sup>24</sup>”. At first glance, it suggests that Jesus can avoid His imminent death and that God can bring in the Kingdom by another means, without Jesus' death [Barbour, *Gethsemane*, 233]. Part of this confusion is due to scholars who have incorrectly called the first class condition, the “condition of fact”, since it was believed that the protasis was true and therefore the sentence could be translated “since [this is true]...then...” Examples exist in the NT which support this hypothesis (Mk 4:23; Jn 11:12). But there are several examples which do not support this hypothesis (Mt 12:27; Jn 10:37), including this one. The purpose of the protasis of the first class condition is to put forward an idea, true or untrue, for consideration followed by the apodosis which gives the resultant action or idea which derives from the fulfilment of the protasis. Jesus, then, through His prayer, is putting forth an idea for consideration, namely, “not to drink the cup”. In fact, the truth of the protasis in a first class condition is determined from the context, not the grammatical construction itself. Therefore, it is only possible to determine if the protasis, “if it is possible (to let this cup pass)”, is true through looking at the context. In the Matthean account, Jesus repeats the conditional statement, once in the positive, “if it is possible...” (Mt 26:39) and once in the negative, “if it is not possible unless I drink the cup...” (Mt 26:42). By doing this Matthew is allowing the reader into Jesus' internal world as Christ processes whether it is indeed possible that the cup may pass. In the positive conditional statement, Jesus examines the possibility of not drinking the cup and avoiding death and God's righteous wrath. But in the negative conditional statement, Jesus has resigned Himself to the Father's will, which is drinking the cup because the cup cannot pass

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<sup>24</sup> Luke substitutes εἰ βούλει for εἰ δυνατόν in order to emphasize resignation to the will of God. Luke shows less interest and concern whether something is possible for God [and thus prayer bargaining] but more concern if the “will” will submit.



unless He drinks it. By working through the process, Jesus has resigned Himself to the Father's will, which includes drinking the cup and the conclusion that it is not possible for Him to let the cup pass. It is obvious that Jesus could indeed let the cup pass and not proceed with His death; so in this sense it is possible that the cup may pass. But Jesus cannot let the cup pass if indeed He wants to fulfill His calling, given at His birth; "[to] save His people from their sins" (Mt 1:21). In the Marcan account (Mk 14:35-36), the statement "all things are possible for you", is added to the conditional statement, "if it is possible...". In so doing, Mark is emphasising the omnipotence of God. But the addition of this phrase also serves to heighten the tension. On the one hand Mark is saying that God is able to do all things but on the other hand is He able to forgive sins without the death of His Son? Jesus tests this idea by asking the Father to take this cup from Him but with one qualification, to do so must be in accordance with the Father's will (Mk 14:36b ἄλλ' οὐ τί ἐγὼ θέλω ἀλλὰ τί σὺ). Mark says Jesus repeated this prayer again (Mk 14:39). The twofold repetition of this prayer functions like Jesus' profession of faith, namely that Jesus has firmly established in His mind that the Father's will is His first priority.

Scholars have tried to determine the motive behind Jesus' statement "εἰ δυνατόν". Lane suggests that Jesus thought, on the basis of Is 51:17-23, that He, like the Israelites, might be spared God's wrath without suffering. Carson believed that this statement may have been "self confessed ignorance" of the same order as Mt 24:36 [Carson, Matthew, 544]. This position seems unlikely since in the threefold passion prediction Jesus does not appear to be ignorant about His need to die rather quite the contrary, He seems clearly aware that He must die<sup>25</sup>. Blaising believes that Jesus utters these words not because Jesus is afraid to drink the cup, but because He is afraid that He will continue to experience the wrath of God after His death [Gundry, Mark, 870]. Actually the converse is true. Jesus is afraid of the experience of death but He is not afraid that He will

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<sup>25</sup>In these predictions, Jesus speaks of the necessity, inevitability and inescapability of His death [Mk 8:31]. For a fuller explanation of this issue see Vanhoye, Albert "L'angoisse du Christ", p. 382.

continue to experience the wrath of God after His death since in His passion predictions He states that He will be raised. Christ's resurrection is His guarantee that He has finished drinking the wrath of God and that He has been vindicated and reinstated to His former Glory. Therefore there is a need for a better way to explain the motive behind Jesus' statement "εἰ δυνατόν". Since Jesus is fully human and fully God, there is a natural tension within His being. Therefore in His Deity, He knows that it is not possible for Him to avoid the cup since it is the only way to fulfil the Father's will; to save people from their sins. But in His humanity, He is confronted with the horror of death. Though He is life itself (Jn 14:6) He was now to experience something totally antithetical to His being. His human nature led Him to consider the possibility of another way of fulfilling His calling. But through prayer He concluded that there was no other way but to follow the will of God. Therefore Jesus could come to the decision that though "all things are possible for God" [Mt 19:26] in that He is omnipotent, "not all things are possible for God" when they contradict His will or nature. Therefore if Jesus avoided the Cross it would contradict the Father's will and righteous nature<sup>26</sup>.

Luke 22:43-44 has no parallel in Matthew and Mark. It is not without its problems because strong external evidence [P<sup>69,75</sup>, <sup>κ</sup><sup>a</sup>] calls for its exclusion. The internal evidence is inconclusive [see note #9]. The purpose of these two verses is twofold; first to describe the intensity of His struggle through presentation of His posture, ἐκτενέστερον<sup>27</sup>, and His emotional state, γενόμενος ἐν ἀγωνίᾳ and ἐγένετο ὁ ἰδρῶς αὐτοῦ ὥσεί θρόμβοι αἵματος καταβαίνοντος ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν; second, to describe the purpose of prayer, as the means to receive strength in order to embrace God's will. Since Luke is more interested in the theme of prayer and presenting Jesus as the paradigm for prayer, than he is the disciple's

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<sup>26</sup> John later chooses to resolve this tension, by emphasizing the inevitability of His suffering [Jn 12:27; "Shall I say, Father, save me from this hour? No, for this purpose I came to this hour" [see Hooker, *Message*, 99].

<sup>27</sup>The literal meaning of ἐκτενέστερον, "more stretched out" is preferable to the metaphorical meaning, "more earnestly".

failure, Luke limits to one the number of times Jesus prays and return to the disciples.

### Jesus Returns to the Sleeping Disciples

When Jesus returns from His first prayer he finds the disciples sleeping and thus failing to heed His command to watch. Jesus addresses Peter specifically [except in Luke] concerning his powerlessness, to remain alert for even one hour. "Hour" may be taken literally here or at least the short time in which Jesus was alone praying. Matthew tones down Jesus' rebuke of Peter in Mark, by omitting the question Σίμων, καθεύδεις, by excluding the name Σίμων which is a reference to the Old Peter and by asking the question οὐκ ἰσχύσατε μίαν ὥραν γρηγορήσαι in the second person plural. This was done firstly because Matthew was a disciple and thus empathises with Peter and secondly because Matthew does not have the same purpose as Mark does for the disciples. Mark consistently shows the failure of the disciples to understand who Jesus is, because he wants to show his readers that Jesus can only be understood in terms of a Suffering Servant.

In Matthew and Mark (Mt 26:41; Mk 14:38), Jesus links προσεύχεσθε with γρηγορεῖτε which suggests the emphasis is shifting from watching with Jesus (Matthew adds μετ' ἐμου, in Mt 26:40 to emphasise this) to the disciples' need to be prepared for the future temptation by praying for themselves. The reason for Jesus' twofold command "to watch and pray" is that the "spirit is willing but the flesh is weak". But what do these authors mean by spirit and flesh? Lane believes this refers to the Holy Spirit in its power [so Schweizer, Mark, 314] in contrast to human weakness. The unusual phrase, πνεῦμα πρόθυμον, according to Lane, has its background in Ps. 51:12 where he equates it with רוח נדיבה [MT Ps. 51:14; in the LXX Ps. 52:12 ἡγεμονικὸς πνεῦμα]. Therefore spiritual alertness is only possible through full dependence upon God through the HS. Hill believes Mark's understanding of pneuma is psychological and thus refers to the human spirit [Mk. 2:8; 8:12]. Flesh does not refer to "life in opposition to God and the Spirit but to the frailty of the body" [Hill, Greek Words, 242]. The



former position is considered to import Paul's theology into Mark's. Also Hill does not think the parallelism to the HS is that clear. He believes the "willing spirit is closer in meaning to the experience of joy in God's salvation and connotes a human spirit responsive to God and capable of meeting the demands of the new situation [therefore] the logic of the narrative requires that the distinctive between spirit and flesh be understood, not in terms of the difference between God and man but between the will of man and his physical weakness" [Hill, *Greek Words*, 243]. Lane's argument has greater weight since the context stresses the need to align oneself with the will of God, which is only possible by having the Spirit of God [c.f. 1 Cor 2:10-16] and because Jesus' example of being tempted to let the cup pass demonstrated the tension between the human will and the will of God.

### **The Disciples' Failure**

In the previous section we learned that in Mark the disciples were unable to remain awake because of their human frailty, whereas in Luke the disciples are exonerated from their weakness by Luke attributing their sleep to grief. Usually one thinks of lying awake from grief (Ps. 6:6), though in light of Jn. 16:6, 20-22, Mk. 14:19 Luke may be giving a fair representation of the actual events. The NEB translation of Lk. 22:45, "worn out by grief" reflects the nuance well.

After a brief mention of Jesus' second prayer (14:39), Mark states three important facts in 14:40; the state (i.e. sleeping) in which Jesus finds the disciples, the reason for their sleeping and their inability to respond [14:40c]. Clearly, for Mark, there has been a shift of emphasis from Jesus' prayer to the disciples' failure to remain alert. Mark uses a γάρ clause, to state the reason for their failure to remain awake; ἦσαν γὰρ αὐτῶν οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ καταβαρυνόμενοι<sup>28</sup>. Through this clause, Mark alludes to the

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<sup>28</sup> καταβαρυνόμενοι is an intensive form of βαρέω which means "to weigh down" or "to be heavy".

disciples' human frailty and their spiritual blindness in Christ's hour of need, seemingly unable to perceive the gravity and significance of the situation. Therefore, as Kelber notes, Mark is less concerned with "the disciples" being overcome with sleep but rather their metaphysical blindness." [Kelber, *Gethsemane*, 179]. The disciples' failure to recognise or understand the significance of the hour is reminiscent of their ignorance of the transfiguration and for this reason Mark uses a clause which is very similar to the clause found in Mark 9:6, οὐκ γὰρ ᾔδει τί ἀποκριθῇ. Therefore, in Mark, the second prayer emphasises the failure of the disciples to recognise the Christological significance of this event (c.f. Mk 14:41).

Matthew's emphasis is somewhat different. Firstly, he maintains the structure of the first prayer; the address to the Father, conditional clause and qualifying clause γεννηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου. The style and language of the prayer is again reminiscent of his Lord's prayer in Mt. 6:9-13. He emphasises the return of Jesus, πάλιν ἐκ δευτέρου, as a reminder to his readers that Jesus cares and thus returns to care for His flock. Again, the content of the prayer refers to the τὸ ποτήριον. Through the use of the conditional phrase ἐὰν μὴ αὐτὸ πῖω, Matthew shows the reader that God's will can only be accomplished if He drinks the cup. Jesus submits to His Father's plan willingly. Matthew also makes reference to the "heavy eyes" of the disciples though he lessens the intensity of Mark's word, from καταβαρυνόμενοι to βεβαρημένοι. It appears there is not the shift in emphasis as in Mark mainly because Matthew is more interested in showing his readers how Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures by aligning His will with the Father's than showing the disciples' failure to recognise the Christological significance of the event.

Mark 14:41 records Jesus' third return to the disciples. This time Mark makes no mention of Jesus' prayer and only includes a reference to the disciples sleeping, thus drawing attention to the failure of the disciples to stay awake. Jesus' return marks the end of the threefold prayer and return to the failure of the disciples to stay awake. It is possible that Mark is recording the historical event which included the threefold prayer and return. But it is possible that the singular prayer/return motif of Luke has been expanded to

three. Scholars have differed in their understanding of the background of the threefold prayer/return motif. It is possible that it could be based on the Jewish tradition that a man in distress customarily prayed three times [Dan 6:10,13; 2 Cor 12:8; Schweizer, Mark, 310]. The problem with this position is that it does not take into consideration the threefold return only the threefold prayer. It is more likely that the threefold prayer and return to sleeping disciples is used to balance the threefold call “to stay awake” at the end of the Olivet Discourse in Mark [14:33-37]. In Mk 14:33-37, Jesus exhorts, the three disciples (and Andrew) to stay awake until the Lord returns. Thus thematically Mk 13:33-37 and Mk 14:32-42 are similar in that the disciples are to stay awake until the Lord returns from each time of prayer but ultimately at His parousia. Linguistically, the parallels between the passages are evident as seen in the overlap of language [e.g. ἔρχομαι, εὐρίσκω, καθεύδω, γρηγορέω].

The sentence Καθεύδετε [τὸ] λοιπὸν καὶ ἀναπαύεσθε has various interpretations. Cranfield in his commentary, outlines three possibilities a) an ironical command or rebuke: to continue to sleep since Jesus does not perceive the need for them to remain awake with Him anymore; b) a serious command: to sleep in order to remain protected since He sees Judas and His betrayers approaching; c) an interrogative: “are you still sleeping?” To Cranfield’s list can be added Moule’s translation “all that is left to do is sleep” [Idiom, 161] and Blass and Debrunner’s idea that it is as an exclamatory statement; “So you are still sleeping and taking rest” [Greek Grammar, §451.6]. Within its context, it is most appropriate to take it as an interrogative since it heightens the intensity of the contrast between staying awake [and praying] and sleeping.

Scholars have struggled to ascertain the exact meaning of ἀπέχει in Mk 14:41. Matthew avoids this difficulty by omitting ἀπέχει from his text. Determining the meaning of ἀπέχει in Mark’s account is complicated by the fact there is no subject given, the verb stands alone. Some later copyists noticed this and amended the text by adding τὸ τέλος. But the variant, ἀπέχει τὸ τέλος, must be rejected on grounds of the external evidence [the date and character of the manuscript evidence is poor] and the internal evidence [shorter



more difficult reading plus the variant appears to be a Western/Caesarean gloss based on Lk. 22:37]. ἀπέχει can be used in an impersonal or a personal sense. J. deZwaan [*Text*] rejects the use of ἀπέχει in the impersonal sense and thus disagrees with the translations “it is sufficient” [referring to disciples’ sleeping] or “it is finished” [referring to Judas’ act of taking Jesus] or “it is paid up” [the bribe money has been paid to Judas]. de Zwaan is correct to reject these translations since no translation reflects the most common meaning of ἀπέχει, “to receive a sum in full” (BAGD, 84) and no translation takes into consideration the context, which has Judas entering into the scene. Therefore, the personal usage of ἀπέχει is appropriate. G.H. Boobyer [*Text*, 44-48] states that ἀπέχει is an asyndeton which serves to contrast the behaviour of the disciples sleeping on the one hand and Judas the betrayer on the other. His translation is therefore “You are still sleeping”. He [Judas] is taking possession of [me]! Boobyer is correct on two accounts; first he recognises that the context requires that Judas become the subject of ἀπέχει and second he astutely points out that ἀπέχει serves to contrast the disciples and Judas. But Boobyer misses the mark when he translates ἀπέχει, as “he is taking possession of me”. Boobyer is mistaken, since ἀπέχει does not mean “to take” but “to receive”. Furthermore, at this point in the story, Judas is not taking possession of Jesus since Judas is still a distance away; Judas is near and can be seen by Jesus but he is not there yet (see Mk 14:42; ὁ παραδιδούς με ἤγγικεν). Thus J. deZwaan [*Text*, 459-72] is correct to say that ἀπέχει refers to Judas’ action of receiving the bribe. His translation, with which I agree, is “he has received (it)”. This best fits the immediate context and fulfils Jesus’ betrayal-prediction (Mk 10:33).

The hour referred to in Mk 14:35 has now arrived in Mk 14:41 and His three passion predictions (Mk 8:31; 9:31; 10:34) are coming to fruition. Mark by using ἰδοῦ (Mk 14:41) draws attention to the fulfilment of a promise, in order to introduce the Son of Man’s betrayal. In essence, the Father is handing the Son over to Satan’s sphere of power and death (n.b. the divine passive of παραδίδωμι). Christ is to be tried and killed by Satan’s agents (c.f. 1 Cor 2:6-7), “sinners” in much the same way John the Baptist was handed over and killed by “sinners” [1:14]. “Being handed over to authorities” is a theme which Mark has mentioned before (13:9). Indirectly

Mark is alerting his readers to the fact that just as Jesus was handed over to the authorities, they too may be handed over. Mark's insertion of the Messianic title ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, serves a Christological purpose, to conjoin His identity with His destiny, which the disciples have failed to see and hopefully Mark's readers will not miss. Matthew's clause, ἤγγικεν ἡ ὥρα, and Mark's clause, ὁ παραδιδούς με ἤγγικεν, emphasise the temporal and personal element of Jesus' betrayal respectively. Time is important to Matthew since the arrival of this hour also means that the OT prophesies are now being fulfilled [Mt 26:56]. For Mark it makes the reality of persecution very real and the essence of Christ's identity clear.

### **Exhortation to Face Trials**

The text of Mark and Matthew are the same in this final exhortation (Mt 26:46; Mk 14:42) in which Jesus tells His disciples "to rise and go". In Mk 14:41, Jesus proclaims that "The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners" but in Mk 14:42, Jesus exhorts "let us go". Mark has changed from the third person [14:41] to the first person. The effect of this is that Jesus is not portrayed not so much as being betrayed as much as He is choosing to face God's will unwaveringly, regardless of the cost. The use of the hortatory subjunctive denotes it is a call for all Christians to face the battle in the same way. Therefore story ends on a note of enthusiasm for his readers to rise [possibly "wake up!"] and face their betrayer with confidence since Christ did. Cranfield astutely notes that there is underlying typological contrast between Adam and Christ. Adam, while in the Garden of Eden, rebelled against God and brought death [Gen. 3:1-19; betrayer] but Christ, while in the Garden of Gethsemane, obeyed God and brought life and thus reversed the effects of the former rebellion.

### **Conclusion**

Through this critical study it has been shown that the distinctiveness in authorial purpose in the three synoptic accounts is clearly

identified through examining the textual differences. Mark consistently portrayed the disciples in a poor light, as those who regularly missed recognising Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah (Mk 1:1). Furthermore he demonstrates the necessity of Jesus to suffer in order to be true to His essential nature as the Suffering Servant and in order for one to understand His identity as the Son of God and the Christ. In doing this, Mark also shows that Jesus is the paradigm for Mark's readers to follow when faced with tribulation. Matthew, borrowing from Mark, generally tones down the Marcan account. His concern, in writing to a predominately Jewish audience, is to show Christ as the fulfilment of the OT prophecies [Immanuel, the cup bearer], to highlight the role of Peter in the Church and hopefully to lessen the Jews' obduracy to the gospel. Finally, Luke uses this pericope as a model for prayer so that his readers will be prepared to face the temptations ahead of them, their cross or betrayer.

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## **Dogs, Adulterers, and the Way of Balaam: The Forms and Socio-Rhetorical Function of the Polemical Rhetoric in 2 Peter (Part I)\***

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This article examines the social and rhetorical dimensions of the polemical language in 2 Peter in order to understand its primary function within the epistle. After taking stock of the situation of social conflict, I classify the various pejorative labels and categories used in description of the opponents. Then, I appeal to the sociology of deviance as a tool to help elucidate their contextual function, namely as defamatory devices used to caste aspersion on the opponents and, ultimately, secure the author's own teachings and authority within the congregations.

The polemical rhetoric found in the New Testament is an alluring feature for the general reader, as well as the scholar. This attraction to polemics lies not only in our interest in the heatedness of the rhetoric, but also in the evident friction between groups that was created or perpetuated through its employment. In short, (much of) the polemical rhetoric that has been canonized in the New Testament captures various glimpses of the tenuous and tumultuous circumstances surrounding the emergence of "Christian" groups in the first and early second centuries. As a result, it has drawn interest within multiple scholarly contexts.

Prominent amongst these is the study of early Jewish-Christian relations.<sup>1</sup> Here, the examination of polemics has played an

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important part in the overall analysis of important issues, such as the partings of the ways and anti-Semitism or anti-Judaism in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> In addition to these larger issues, polemical rhetoric also has received attention in studies that are more limited in scope, such as analyses of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3,<sup>3</sup> communal identity in the gospels of John and Matthew,<sup>4</sup> and the Pastoral Epistles.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, interest and scholarship on early Christian polemical rhetoric is wide-ranging.

Yet, with this widespread, scholarly interest in polemics, it is surprising that very little sustained attention has been given to the topic of New Testament polemical rhetoric, as a whole. In short, studies focused solely on the rhetoric of polemics in the New Testament largely have been neglected. The only notable exceptions to this neglect are Luke Johnson's oft cited article, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic"<sup>6</sup> and Andrie du Toit's lesser known but quite

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<sup>1</sup> See Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70-170 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Claudia Setzer, *Jewish Responses to Early Christians: History and Polemics, 30-150 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); and William Horbury, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> See James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM, 1991) and the essays collected in Craig A. Evans and Donald A. Hagner, eds., *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), respectively.

<sup>3</sup> See Adela Yarbro Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition in the Book of Revelation," *HTR* (1986) 308-20.

<sup>4</sup> See Sean Freyne, "Vilifying the Other and Defining the Self: Matthew's and John's Anti-Jewish Polemic in Focus," in *"To See Ourselves as Others See Us": Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity*, eds. Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985) 117-43.

<sup>5</sup> See Robert J. Karris, "The Background and Significance of the Polemic in the Pastoral Epistles," *JBL* 92 (1973) 549-64 and L. T. Johnson, "II Timothy and the Polemic Against False Teachers: A Re-Examination," *JrelS* 6/7 (1978-79) 1-26.

<sup>6</sup> *JBL* 108 (1989) 419-41.

valuable essay, "Vilification as a Pragmatic Device in Early Christian Epistolography."<sup>7</sup> Johnson, in his work, takes up a historical, social, and literary-critical examination of the rhetoric of slander (i.e., polemics) that is directed by Christians against Jewish opponents, as seen in the New Testament. He concludes the following: (1) in view of the contemporary conventions of the rhetoric of slander/polemic (both Hellenistic and Jewish), "the NT's slander against fellow Jews is remarkably mild"<sup>8</sup> and (2) the strongly connotative, rather than denotative, import of the conventional rhetoric of polemics "signifies simply that these are opponents and such things should be said about them."<sup>9</sup> In a conceptual furtherance of Johnson's work, du Toit examines a performative dimension of polemical rhetoric, namely, how some early Christian authors used *vituperatio* as a device by which to attempt to influence their audiences.<sup>10</sup> Here, I aim to extend and expand upon du Toit's work and, thus, build upon Johnson's foundational insights.

In this article I do not intend to address the entirety of the polemical rhetoric in the New Testament. My interest lies with the rhetoric of polemics that emerges out of situations of internal social conflict—i.e., conflict within early Christian groups, as seen in the epistolary

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<sup>7</sup> *Bib* 75 (1994) 403-412. Another fine work on polemical rhetoric in early Christianity and Judaism is G. N. Stanton, "Aspects of Early Christian-Jewish Polemic and Apologetic," *NTS* 31 (1985) 377-92. However, since the focus of Stanton's work falls largely outside the NT (i.e., on Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, the *Testament of Levi*, other non-canonical Christian literature, and only briefly on the canonical gospels), it stands just outside the bounds of this article. Finally, see also Lauri Thurén, "Hey Jude! Asking for the Original Situation and Message of a Catholic Epistle," *NTS* 43 (1997) 451-465.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, "Anti-Jewish Slander," 441. Johnson further notes that the NT's harshest polemic is reserved not for Jews but, rather, for Gentiles and/or other deviant insiders to the messianic movement.

<sup>9</sup> Johnson, "Anti-Jewish Slander," 441. In short, the anti-Jewish rhetoric of slander is designed simply to demarcate "the opponent" and not to provide an objective description of them; it is entirely prescriptive, rather than descriptive, language.

<sup>10</sup> du Toit, "Vilification," 404.

literature of the New Testament.<sup>11</sup> Yet, since this body of material is much too large to address in a brief essay, I will utilize 2 Peter as a heuristic device.<sup>12</sup> Outside of the introduction, the paper is divided into four main sections: (1) taking stock of the situation of social conflict in 2 Peter, (2) a categorization of the forms of polemical rhetoric found in the epistle, (3) an analysis of the socio-rhetorical function of the polemical rhetoric, and (4) some conclusions and observations on studying and reading the rhetoric of polemics in similar instances within the New Testament. Through my analysis of the rhetoric of polemics in 2 Peter, I hope to refine further the scholarly study of the subject and propose a paradigm for reading and assessing this particular subset of polemical rhetoric.

### The Situation of Social Conflict in 2 Peter

Based upon the evidence yielded by the author of 2 Peter, the situation of conflict described in the epistle is surely an internal phenomenon. The author of the epistle is attempting to counter a group of teachers who are within the congregations to which the epistle is addressed. Evidence that these opponents were, at least at one time, insiders to the local congregations can be found in many of the author's accusations where he not only expresses his harsh condemnation of them but also implicitly notes their (former) insider status. The author admits that the opponents had once followed "the straight way" (2:15), known "the way of righteousness" (2:21), and "escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," (2:20; cf. 1:9), only later to "have gone astray," "to have turned back," and become "entangled and overpowered by them," respectively.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> E.g., Galatians; 1 Cor 5; 11:17-34; 1-2 Timothy; Titus; 2 Peter; Jude; Revelation 2-3.

<sup>12</sup> As 2 Peter contains an abundance and varied forms of polemical rhetoric, found within a setting of internal social conflict, the letter presents itself as a prime object for the study of such a topic and as a springboard by which to approach polemical rhetoric in various other NT epistles.

<sup>13</sup> It is important to remember that the reader is privy only to the voice of the author in this situation of internal conflict. The fact, then, that the author insinuates that



Furthermore, the author contends that the opponents are “reveling in their deceitful pleasures while they are feasting with you” (2:13) and that they “distort to their own destruction” the letters of Paul and the other scriptures (3:15-16). Here, the author indicates that the opponents were not only former members of the local congregations, but that at least some of them also are currently active insiders, in that they appear to be still involved in the eucharist and in the (public) interpretation of the scriptures.<sup>14</sup> The primary objection expressed by the author against these insiders concerns their eschatological skepticism.<sup>15</sup> The writer of 2 Peter claims that these internal teachers question the parousia, judgement, and power of Jesus Christ (1:16; 3:4, 10; cf. 2:19). As a corollary to this accusation, the author further contends that they deny the cleansing of past sins and, thus, Christ’s ability and/or desire to forgive sins (1:9; 2:1, 20). “In sum, these skeptics denied God’s past, present, and future involvement in the world and human affairs, divine communication through and control over prophecy, and divine judgment of either sinners or the righteous.”<sup>16</sup> The principal product that stemmed from the opponents’ eschatological skepticism was their justification of moral libertinism (2:10, 19).<sup>17</sup>

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these “opponents” were once insiders is surprising and revealing because the admission seems to hinder rather than further his argumentative aims. Finally, I will continue to approach the contextual situation from the vantagepoint of the author, not in order to privilege or endorse his account but to attempt to examine what role(s) the polemical rhetoric of the epistle plays in the author’s overall efforts at persuasion.

<sup>14</sup> The internal nature of the situation of conflict is further highlighted through various other incidental comments in the epistle (1:16; 2:1, 2; 3:4). Cf. Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC 50, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Waco: Word, 1983) 154-5 and Tord Fornberg, *An Early Church in a Pluralistic Society: A Study of 2 Peter*, ConBNT 9 (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1977) 49-50.

<sup>15</sup> See Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 154 and Duane Frederick Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style: Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter*, SBLDS 104, ed. Charles Talbert (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 82.

<sup>16</sup> John H. Elliott, “Peter, Second Epistle Of,” in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 285.

This moral freedom likely was connected to their compromise with pagan moral standards which, in the author's view, would constitute a transgression of communal norms or limits and, thus, provide a threat to the distinct identity of the group.<sup>18</sup>

The severity of this deviant threat to the limits of the Christian community is quite high, at least in the eyes of the author. The severe character of the threat can be seen in a number of different aspects of the epistle. First, though the author portrays the hearers as being quite firm in the faith and only in need of some reminders (1:12-15; 3:1-2), the looming presence of deviant opponents identifies a situation characterized not primarily by security. The primary impetus behind the writing of the epistle was not simply the desire to affirm the readers or to set out the content of proper teachings. Rather, it was the author's perception of deviance within the congregations that was the primary warrant for the letter. Therefore, the warm affirmations of the hearers' security in the faith serve as a (rhetorical) device that likely is intended to conceal any success the opponents may have been enjoying, thus hiding the severity of the threat.<sup>19</sup> Second, the fact that chapter two is chock-full of polemical rhetoric directed against the opponents reveals not only the intensity of the author's concerns but also the actual

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<sup>17</sup> The moral libertinism of the opponents, along with the references to angels and knowledge, has led some scholars to label them "gnostics"—e.g., J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, Black's New Testament Commentaries, ed. Henry Chadwick (London: A & C Black, 1969) 231. However, upon a close examination of the letter, it is readily observable that these opponents do not fit precisely that profile. Michel Desjardins, "The Portrayal of the Dissidents in 2 Peter and Jude: Does it Tell Us More About the 'Godly' Than the 'Ungodly'?", *JSNT* 30 (1987) 95 contends that "Gnosticism, in whatever stage or form, had little or nothing to do with these communities." Cf. Fornberg, *An Early Church*, 31.

<sup>18</sup> See Fornberg, *An Early Church*, 120; Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 155-6; and Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 82.

<sup>19</sup> Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 99 notes that the reminding nature of the letter is standard to the farewell discourse genre and also is highly rhetorical in function.

severity of the threat at hand.<sup>20</sup> Finally, the severity of the threat also is evident in the opponents' success in winning followers (2:2-3; 3:17; cf. 2:14, 18).<sup>21</sup> This public dimension of the threat not only indicates its severity but also a possible crisis within the community itself. If people were actually being won over to the opponents' way—which I would contend that they were, since even the author implies that some had been—then the people of the community, not just the author, would be well aware of these conditions of competition and opposition.<sup>22</sup>

In reaction to the severe threat stemming from the opposing group's eschatological skepticism, the author of 2 Peter marshals a hearty response. Initially, the author attempts to counter the claims of the opponents through the employment of specific teachings (3:3-10; cf. 1:20-21) and ethical exhortation (1:3-11; 3:14-15, 17-18; cf. 3:11). In response to the opponents' eschatological skepticism, the author predicts the coming of mockers in ignorance (3:3-6) and mounts a proper defense of the seeming delay of God's judgment (3:7-10).<sup>23</sup> On top of these teachings, the author supplies the readers with much

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<sup>20</sup> This statement is built upon the concept that the closer and more threatening rivals become, the stronger the response needed to rebut and/or refute them. In this line, Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 115 notes that "the length of the *digressio* is indicative of the seriousness of the case."

<sup>21</sup> The pseudonymity of the letter and the author's stress of apostolic teaching are further indicators of the severity of the threat at hand. Cf. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 154.

<sup>22</sup> Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 82 contends that "the audience certainly must also perceive the exigence within its midst, but what interest they have in it, what quality they ascribe to it, and what they see as the consequences of it, are impossible to determine from the content of the epistle."

<sup>23</sup> See Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Form and Background of the Polemic in 2 Peter," *JBL* 99 (1980) 407-31. This article is a distillation of his doctoral dissertation, *The Form and Background of the Polemic in 2 Peter* (Unpublished dissertation: Yale University, 1977). Neyrey has demonstrated convincingly that much of the form and content of the polemic in 2 Peter is modeled after an Epicurean polemic designed to combat the charge of a delay in divine judgment and, thus, a denial of theodicy.



ethical exhortation that not only sets out the substance of “proper” living but, again, counters the position of the opponents.<sup>24</sup> Yet, the author’s persuasive intent extends even further. The situation of conflict evident here concerns not only the issues of correct teachings and living but also, and maybe even primarily, that of authority within the group and community. Therefore, in an effort to bolster his own position and authority, and demolish that of his opponents, the author incorporates both a broad-based appeal to outside authority and a severe condemnation of the adversaries into his response.<sup>25</sup>

In hopes of solidifying the allegiance of the hearers, the author appeals to an array of authoritative texts, traditions, and figures. One common method of establishing authority used here is an argument based on historical precedence and antiquity. Over against the novel ideas of the false teachers, the author of 2 Peter posits a range of “older, venerable, and more probative testimony of prophetic [“holy prophets” 3:2; OT proverb 2:22; OT and Jewish allusions 2:4-8; cf. 2:16; “commandment of the Lord and Savior” 3:2] and apostolic tradition [Paul 3:15-16; previous letter of Peter 3:1; apostleship of Peter 1:16-18].”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the strong

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<sup>24</sup> The reactionary character of the ethical exhortation can be seen in that it consistently espouses teachings that are diametrically opposed to those touted by the opposing teachers. For example, the author’s denunciation of the opponents includes the accusation (in 2:13) that they are “spots and blemishes” (σπίλοι καὶ μῶροι), implying a corrupt moral character. In opposition, the author exhorts the readers/hearers in 3:14 to be “without spots and without blemishes” (ἄσπιλοι καὶ ἀμώμητοί). The diametric opposition in these two commands lends credence to the thesis that the author is setting out the substance of “proper” ethical living in light of the teachings and claims of the opponents. This tendency of the author can be further observed by comparing the polemical charges against the opponents in 2:18-20 with the ethical exhortation to the congregations in 1:3-4. Cf. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 276-7.

<sup>25</sup> See Elliott, “Peter, Second Epistle Of,” 286. I will reserve a treatment of the author’s severe condemnation of the opponents, via polemical rhetoric, for the next section.

<sup>26</sup> Elliott, “Peter, Second Epistle Of,” 286. Cf. Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 84 on the role of tradition as constraints in the rhetorical argument of the author and Fornberg, *An Early Church*, 21-7 on the authority of Paul’s letters for the author of 2 Peter and the wider community.

(literary) dependence and reliance upon the epistle of Jude is a further attempt by the author to establish his base of authority.<sup>27</sup> Finally, the author further attempts to bolster his position and authority by relying upon “the Word of God” (3:5), other traditional forms of teaching/instruction, such as the “way of truth” and the “way of righteousness” (2:2, 21; cf. 1:12; 2:15),<sup>28</sup> and his own reminders (1:12-13; 3:1) that hearken back, pseudonymously, to the figure and authority of Peter. Ultimately, the pseudonymous author has lined up multiple historical figures and sources of authority in an attempt to establish further his own authority and solidify the allegiance of the hearers to his position (over against that of the opponents).

Now I will turn to take-up a more in-depth analysis of the various forms of polemical rhetoric used by the author in condemnation of the opponents.

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<sup>27</sup> As has been recognized by many, Jude and 2 Peter share a close literary relationship, especially in their employment of polemical rhetoric. Following current scholarly consensus, I assume the priority of Jude. Thus, I contend that the author of 2 Peter knows of and uses Jude as a source in the construction of his epistle. Furthermore, the large amount of borrowing that occurs not only highlights the indebtedness of 2 Peter to Jude, but possibly also the prominence and/or current authoritative status of Jude within (at least parts of) Asia Minor.

<sup>28</sup> In 2 Peter, the author utilizes ὁδὸς and ὁδὸν to represent an ethical way of life. The term is employed not only when referring to the “proper” (that is, proper according to the author) way of life (e.g., “way of truth” 2:2; “the straight way” 2:15; and “the way of righteousness” 2:21), but also to “the way of Balaam” (2:15), an “improper” and “unethical” (again, according to the author) way of life. The use of the term/phrase, “the way” or “the way of life,” was quite common in OT, Jewish, and early Christian literature. See Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 241-2. Bauckham notes that the metaphor did not represent a specific body of doctrine, but “a whole moral and religious way of life.” Therefore, though this body of ethical guidelines most likely would not have been codified, in a formal sense, it would have been known informally and observed as traditional teachings/instructions.

## The Forms of Polemical Rhetoric in 2 Peter

2 Peter, along with Jude, appear to be the most densely packed polemical documents in the New Testament.<sup>29</sup> Yet, in this abundance, very little, if any, of the rhetoric possesses even a measure of objective accuracy.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the polemical rhetoric in the epistle should be taken not as descriptive but prescriptive rhetoric, in that it is intended solely to prescribe negative qualities to these opposing teachers. I now will attempt to categorize these various forms of polemical rhetoric found within 2 Peter, while also citing similar forms that appear elsewhere in the New Testament.<sup>31</sup>

### I. Moral Depravity<sup>32</sup>

A common strategy utilized by the author of 2 Peter to denigrate the adversaries was to call into question their moral character. The two most prominent forms of this strategy are that of "sexual imagery" and "greed," which will be highlighted below.

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<sup>29</sup> Elliott, "Peter, Second Epistle Of," 284 highlights this point in noting that the style of the epistle is "marked by excess rather than economy of expression."

<sup>30</sup> The author's charge in 2:1, that the opponents are "denying the Master who bought them," however, seems to be an exception to this claim. On the methodology of mirror-reading polemics, see John M. G. Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," *JSNT* 31 (1987) 73-93. Yet, in this article, I do not intend to re-construct the identity of the opponents in 2 Peter. Rather, I am interested primarily in the rhetoric used by the author in his response to them, whoever exactly they may be.

<sup>31</sup> Here, I will group the various forms of polemical rhetoric in an inductive fashion, based on the type of image being employed. Though I could have utilized Greco-Roman (or Jewish) rhetorical categories to systematize these forthcoming examples of early Christian rhetoric, I have opted not to in order to stress the synchronic dimension of the rhetoric (over against its diachronic aspect). The background behind these forms of early Christian polemical rhetoric is definitely an important issue but one I have chosen to leave for a later essay, allowing the rhetoric of early Christianity to function first on its own terms.

<sup>32</sup> See du Toit, "Vilification," 408-9.



### A. Sexual Imagery (μοιχαλίδες; ἀσέλγεια; ἐπιθυμία)

One of the most prevalent and striking forms of polemical rhetoric found in 2 Peter is that of sexual depravity. Here, the author characterizes the opponents as “adulterous” (μοιχαλίδος 2:14), “licentious” (ἀσέλγεια 2:2, 18; cf. 2:7), and as indulging in and/or following their own “lust” (ἐπιθυμία 1:4; 2:10, 18) or “lusts” (3:3). Although these terms can refer to specific actions and emotions relating to sexuality, they likely are not intended to do so here.<sup>33</sup> Rather, the polemical rhetoric is used metaphorically to describe behavior that, for the author, is on par with sexual depravity. The metaphorical notion of these terms is well established. The usage of the metaphorical sense of “adultery” goes as far back as the prophets’ description of Israel’s unfaithfulness to Yahweh and extends to James’ polemical outburst against the rich (Jas 4:4).<sup>34</sup> The final two terms, though too having specific referents in sexuality, also convey a less literal sense in their New Testament usage. ἀσέλγεια came to describe not only sexual debauchery, but debauchery in general, hence its frequent employment in New Testament vice lists (e.g., Mark 7:22; Rom 13:13; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19).<sup>35</sup> Similarly, ἐπιθυμία has come to mark lust of the flesh not simply in sexual terms (e.g., Rom 1:24) but also in a broader sense, such as in coveting (e.g., Rom 7:7-8) or that which came naturally to believers prior to their conversion (e.g., Eph 2:3; 4:22).<sup>36</sup> The prevalence of the charge of “sexual depravity,” including but not

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<sup>33</sup> Fornberg, *An Early Church*, 48 contends that the author of 2 Peter borrowed the polemical rhetoric relating to sexual immorality from Jude but that it is not the center of interest in 2 Peter (as it is in Jude).

<sup>34</sup> The figurative sense of the term is found in a vice list at 1 Cor 6:9 and in the gospel writers’ respective responses to the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 12:39), Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt 16:4), and the disciples and a crowd (Mark 8:38).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Eph 4:19; Jude 4.

<sup>36</sup> Although the term most often conveys a negative sense, it also can be utilized in a positive light (e.g., 1 Thess 2:17). Other examples of the figurative use of the term can be found in Jude 16, 18.

limited to these three terms, indicates that it may have been a stock image of polemics.<sup>37</sup>

## B. Greed (πλεονεξία)

A second image of moral depravity employed by the author of 2 Peter is "greediness." Here, the author warns his readers/hearers that the opponents, in their greed, will exploit them with deceptive words (2:3). He, then, extends the polemical accusation to the character of the opponents by claiming that they have "hearts trained in greed" (2:14). Along with the rhetoric of sexual depravity, πλεονεξία (i.e., greed) also appears to be a stock image of polemical caricature since it too is found frequently in New Testament vice lists (e.g., Mark 7:22; Rom 1:29; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5).<sup>38</sup> As a stock image of polemics, the charge of πλεονεξία would be recognized widely as an indicator of moral depravity, surely bringing the moral character of the opponents into question.

## II. Destined for Destruction (ἀπώλεια; φθορά)<sup>39</sup>

Common to the polemical rhetoric found in situations of social conflict is the contention that the "opponents" are destined for destruction. The destruction assigned to the adversaries in 2 Peter connotes both physical destruction and that which will come from eschatological judgment. In 2:12 the author predicts the physical death of the opponents by comparing them, via simile, to creatures who are born to be "captured and killed (φθορὰν)." Again, in the same verse, the author notes that "in their [i.e., the creatures] destruction (φθορᾶ), they [i.e., the opponents] also will be destroyed

<sup>37</sup> These terms used by the author of 2 Peter do not exhaust the category. For instance, in 1 Tim 1:10; Rev 2:14, 20-21 πορνεία marks the charge of sexual depravity. Cf. 1 Cor 6:9; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Col 3:5, where πορνεία is found in vice lists.

<sup>38</sup> cf. Luke 12:15; Eph 4:19; 1 Thess 2:5; Fornberg, *An Early Church*, 37; and Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 109.

<sup>39</sup> Du Toit, "Vilification," 410 also notes this category but in a broader sense than I undertake here.

(φθορήσονται).” While the precise timing of this physical death is left ambiguous by the author, indicating that it likely would not be an imminent event, the charge of physical destruction is made plain nonetheless.<sup>40</sup> A further branding of the opponents via this charge is found in 3:7, where the author marks the destruction (ἀπωλείας) of the opponents, who are implied within “the godless,” to be on “the day of judgment (ἡμέραν κρίσεως).” Additionally, ἀπώλεια also is employed by the author to characterize the opponents’ αἱρέσεις (2:1), the type of punishment that they will bring upon themselves (2:1), and that which awaits them having been pronounced long ago (2:3), namely, eschatological judgment and destruction (cf. 3:16). As seen here, and elsewhere in the New Testament, ἀπώλεια often signifies destruction that is punishment for the wicked.<sup>41</sup> The insinuation, then, that the opponents are destined for destruction (both physical and eschatological) reflects an attempt to caricature them as wicked.

### III. Blasphemy (Βλασφημέω; ἐμπαίκτης)<sup>42</sup>

One of the most conspicuous and potentially forceful forms of the rhetoric of polemics is that of blasphemy. The charge of blasphemy, though gaining precise meaning based on the specific contextual circumstances, carries a strong denigratory force, in that it connotes a violation of the majesty of God.<sup>43</sup> In 2 Peter, however, the author does not charge the adversaries, directly, with blasphemy

<sup>40</sup> Cf. 2 Pet 2:19 and Rom 8:21. For other NT examples of φθορά and its varied uses see 1 Cor 15:42, 50; Gal 6:8; Col 2:22; as well as 2 Pet 1:4.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. BAGD 103 and Phil 1:28; 3:19.

<sup>42</sup> du Toit, “Vilification,” 408 includes a brief discussion of the charge of blasphemy under the category entitled, “Inflated self-esteem.” Cf. Darrell L. Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus: A Philological-Historical Study of the Key Jewish Themes Impacting Mark 14:61-64*, WUNT II 106, eds. Martin Hengel and Otfried Hofius (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998) 30-112, which contains an extensive discussion of what “blasphemy” meant in ancient Jewish texts.

<sup>43</sup> See du Toit, “Vilification,” 408 who further notes that “it surely was one of the gravest labels which could be attached to anyone.”



against God. Rather, he contends that the opponents blaspheme or, more appropriately, slander (Βλάσφημέω) “the way of truth” (2:2), “the glorious ones” (2:10), and “in ignorance” (2:12). The first charge here (i.e., 2:2) insinuates that the adversaries are blasphemous in that they are slandering a traditionally-held ethical way of life. However, in the other two instances of the term, this type of overt force behind the charge is not as readily observable. Following Bauckham (and others), these teachers appear to be slandering some group of evil angels (the referent of “the glorious ones” in 2:10) to whom even the stronger and more powerful (good) angels do not bring a “slandorous judgment” (Βλάσφημον κρίσιν) from the Lord (2:11).<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, though the opponents are not being charged here with slandering God or God’s holiness, the written and/or oral employment of the Greek term Βλάσφημέω, would still ring of a firm and readily recognizable accusation, namely, that the opponents are blasphemous and their character should be known as such.<sup>45</sup>

Connected with the notion of blasphemy (i.e., the set of those who speak out against or scoff at God) is the label “mockers” (ἐμπαῖκται), a hapax legomenon in the New Testament.<sup>46</sup> The author of 2 Peter indirectly applies this label to his opponents by predicting that in the last days “mockers” (ἐμπαῖκται) will come “mocking” (ἐμπαίγνομη) (3:3), thus identifying the opponents as “people who scorn and despise God’s revelation, both moral and prophetic.”<sup>47</sup> These two labels, then, can be seen to possess a

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<sup>44</sup> See Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 261-3, who also contends that the accusation in 2:12, that the opponents slander in ignorance (ἀγνοοῦσιν), also refers back to these evil angels.

<sup>45</sup> For other NT evidence where this charge and/or label is applied to opponents see Acts 13:45; 18:6; 1 Tim 1:20; 6:4; Jas 2:7; Jude 8; 10; Rev 2:9. Cf. Eph 4:31; Col 3:8; 1 Pet 4:4; Rev 13:5-6.

<sup>46</sup> See also the phrase ὑπέρογκα γὰρ ματαιότητος in 2:18, where ὑπέρογκα can connote high-flown speech against God. Though Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 274 contends that the term, as it is used here, may have lost that specific significance.

<sup>47</sup> Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 289. Cf. Jude 1:18.

similar denigratory thrust; the opponents despise and deride God and the things of God.

#### IV. Follow Myths (μῦθος)

A common and more indirect strategy of caricature, which is seen most vividly in the pastoral epistles, is the accusation that the opponents follow myths (1 Tim 1:4; 4:7; 2 Tim 4:4; Tit 1:14). Here, in sections of ethical exhortation, the readers are warned not to follow, or even give heed to myths (μύθοις/μύθους). While the specific character of the myths in 2 Tim 4:4 are not noted, they are described as “vile and old-womanish” (βεβήλους καὶ γραώδεις) in 1 Tim 4:7; “Jewish” (Ἰουδαικοῖς) in Tit 1:14; and are coupled with “genealogies” (γενεαλογίαις) in 1 Tim 1:4. Implied within these bits of exhortation is a warning against following the myths of the adversaries. In 2 Peter, the author declares that in making known the power and coming of Jesus to the readers/hearers of the epistle, they did not follow cleverly-devised (σεσοφισμένοις) myths; rather they relied on their own eyewitness account (1:16).<sup>48</sup> This verse is double-edged. While it obviously reveals one of multiple attempts by the author to legitimate his own teachings, position, and/or authority, it also implicitly caricatures the opponents and their ways as being fabricated and of human origin.

#### V. Going Astray (πλανάω; ; δελεάζω)

The charge of going or leading others astray is an additional one that is brought against the opponents in 2 Peter. Though the verb, πλανάω, as well as the noun, πλάνη, do not possess any pejorative characteristics which are inherent to them, a depreciatory sense was often picked up in their early Christian usage. In their neutral sense, the terms simply convey the idea of “wandering” (e.g., Heb 11:38). However, at times they were loaded with dangerously evil and

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<sup>48</sup> It is possible that the author is not making a charge against the opponents here but merely attempting to refute one of their claims, due to the appearance of the οὐ...ἀλλὰ formula. Cf. Jerome H. Neyrey, “The Apologetic Use of the Transfiguration in 2 Peter 1:16-21,” *CBQ* 42 (1980) 506-9 and Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 103.

potentially tragic connotations. As a result, early Christian authors often warn their readers against the “deceit”/“error” (πλάνη) of the adversaries and call them to guard against being “lead astray” (πλανάω) by these persons.<sup>49</sup> In 2 Peter, this pejorative sense is employed in 2:15 where the author claims that the opponents have “gone astray” (ἐπανήθησαν) from the straight way and now are “following the way of Balaam.”<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the author uses πλάνη (2:18; 3:17) to denote, or at least connote, the “error” of these opposing teachers. The author’s usage of these terms in the epistle match up with their larger usage in the New Testament, as a derogatory concept used to caricature a “wrong” way of life and, ultimately, an opponent.

Connected to the charge of going or leading astray is the accusation that the opponents have enticed (δεδεάξω) certain persons to follow their ways and teachings (2:14, 18).<sup>51</sup> The accusation of enticement insinuates that the people were not following these teachers out of their own initiative but, rather, that they were being lead away or baited by them. The force of this charge is heightened through the additional contention that the opponents are preying upon those who are “unstable” (2:14) and who have just escaped from those who live in error (2:18). The opponents are being accused of enticing those who are not yet grounded in Christian teaching and who still have not yet broken free from their pagan society; in short, those who largely are defenseless against heretical teachings.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> For this use of πλάνη see Eph 4:14; 1 John 4:6; Jude 11 and for πλανάω see, especially, 2 Tim 3:13; 1 John 2:26; Rev 2:20.

<sup>50</sup> See Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 267-8 on ancient texts which connect the image of “road” or “way” with the notion of “going astray.”

<sup>51</sup> Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 266 notes that the verb means not only to entice, but to do so with a bait. The only other NT example of this verb is found in Jas 1:14, where it talks of humans being tempted and enticed by their own lusts.

<sup>52</sup> Though the manner and tactics by which the teachers are enticing and leading people astray surely are being exaggerated here for rhetorical purposes, the fact that they are accused specifically of preying upon new believers may well reflect some level of objective accuracy within the charge.



## VI. Blind (τυφλός)

Another accusation that the author of 2 Peter indirectly appends to the opponents is that they are blind (τυφλός 1:9). This charge, along with others, is directed at the opposing teachers in a covert, rather than overt, fashion. After exhorting the readers to follow and live by a lengthy list of virtues (1:5-7), the author then states that anyone who lacks them is “nearsighted” (μωπάζων) and “blind.” Here, the author has combined his own word, μωπάζων, a New Testament hapax legomenon, with a term already common to the language of polemical rhetoric, τυφλός.<sup>53</sup> The implicit, yet seemingly glaring, message behind the statement is that the opponents lack these aforementioned virtues and are, thus, spiritually nearsighted and blind.

## VII. Animalistic Imagery (ζῷον; ὑποζύγιον; κύων; ὄς)

A simple category common to polemical rhetoric was that of animalistic imagery (i.e., likening one’s adversary to an animal or beast). In the New Testament we see opponents caricatured as “dogs” (κύων; Phil 3:2; Rev 22:15; cf. Matt 7:6) and wild animals (implied in θηριομαχέω; 1 Cor 15:32).<sup>54</sup> Yet, an even more wide-ranging employment of this category of polemical rhetoric is found in 2 Peter. In the most overt example, the author aligns the opponents with “irrational beasts” (ἄλογα; 2:12) via metaphor.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, in a more indirect manner, he implies that the opponents are more irrational than an “ass” (ὑποζύγιον; 2:16), in aligning them with the Balaam figure and story, and likens them to a “dog” (κύων; 2:22) and a “sow” (ὄς; 2:22) through the citation and extension of an Old Testament proverb (Prov 26:11). In a

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<sup>53</sup> For other NT examples of τυφλός being used as rhetoric of caricature see Matt 15:14 (4x); 23:16, 17, 19, 24, 26; Rev 3:17.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Rom 1:23 and 1 Pet 5:8 where animalistic imagery is used to describe actions of the wicked and the devil, respectively.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Heb 13:11; Jude 10; and multiple instances in Revelation where ζῷον is employed.

related instance, the author calls the teachers “spots and blemishes” (σπίλοι καὶ μῶμοι; 2:13; cf. Eph 5:27), which in the context of sacrificial offerings can refer to impure animal offerings and priests.<sup>56</sup> The ultimate import of employing this category of polemical rhetoric is quite clear; it implies that the opponents are animalistic and, thus, inhuman in their character and actions.

### VIII. Natural Imagery (πηγή; ὁμίχλη)

The employment of natural imagery, as a category of polemical rhetoric, is similar to the use of specific animals and/or animalistic figures, the obvious difference being the types of images that are utilized. The use of natural imagery to caricature an opponent is limited largely to the books of Jude and 2 Peter, again reflecting the high level of overlap in the polemical rhetoric within the two epistles.<sup>57</sup> In Jude 12-13 the opponents are metaphorically compared to “waterless clouds” (νεφέλαι ἄνυδροι), “fruitless autumn trees” (δένδρα φθινοπωρινὰ) that are “twice-dead” and “uprooted,” “wild waves” (κύματα ἄγρια) of the sea, and “wandering stars” (ἀστέρες πλανῆται). It is interesting to note that in each of these four cases the image from nature is modified further by terminology that connotes a devious character. Likewise, in 2 Pet 2:17, partially relying upon Jude, the natural images that are employed also are modified by negative descriptors; “springs” (πηγαὶ) is modified by “waterless” (ἄνυδροι) and “mists” (ὁμίχλαι) is described as being “driven by a tempest.” The seeming implication of this observation is that natural images, in and of themselves, did not connote a strong denigratory force against an opponent. Therefore, they were joined with terminology that made plain the implied message: the character and actions of these opponents were dubious.

<sup>56</sup> Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 265-6 notes this in relation to Lev 1:3 and 21:21.

<sup>57</sup> On the use of natural imagery in 2 Peter and Jude see Fornberg, *An Early Church*, 54-6.

IX. False Figures (e.g., ψευδοπροφήτης; ψευδοδιδάσκαλος)<sup>58</sup>

A more intricate and, possibly more sophisticated, category of polemical rhetoric is that of false figures. In this instance, an author compares his or her opponent(s) to a given false figure type, usually one that is drawn on from the past. These figure types, therefore, have an established history that likely would be well-known amongst the people, heightening the force of the defamation being implied. In the New Testament, most of these false figure types have the ψεύδ- prefix.<sup>59</sup> Hence, the author of 2 Peter employs “false prophets” (ψευδοπροφήται)<sup>60</sup> and “false teachers” (ψευδοδιδάσκαλοι)<sup>61</sup> in 2:1 as types of false figures in order to caricature the opponents.<sup>62</sup> Additional false figure types employed elsewhere in the New Testament are “false apostles” (ψευδαπόστολοι; 2 Cor 11:13; cf. Rev 2:2) and “false brother” (ψευδαδελφους; Gal 2:4). Furthermore, the label ψευδής or “liar,” as seen in Rev 2:2 and 21:8, not only represents a character flaw but, possibly, also a typological label for an opponent.<sup>63</sup> Through the employment of these false figure types, the author hopes that his readers/hearers will see and acknowledge the opponents not as individual human beings but as representatives of a larger, devious figure type.

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<sup>58</sup> du Toit, “Vilification,” 405 identifies a similar category that he titles “Hypocrisy and falseness.” Here, I pick up on du Toit’s idea of falseness but channel it into a more-specific discussion of false figures and how they are used to characterize one’s opponents.

<sup>59</sup> See du Toit, “Vilification,” 405.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Matt 7:15; 24:11, 24; Mark 13:22; Luke 6:26; Acts 13:6; Rev 16:13; 19:20; 20:10; and, especially, 1 John 4:1.

<sup>61</sup> This is a NT *hapax legomenon*.

<sup>62</sup> Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 106-7 notes how the chiasmic structure of 2:1-3a directly aligns the opponents with the false teachers.

<sup>63</sup> However, ψεύστης, as found in 1 Tim 1:10; Tit 1:12; 1 John 1:10; 2:4, 22; 4:20; 5:10, appears to emphasize the characteristic of being a liar rather than representing a specific type of figure.



X. OT Figures and Jewish Tradition (e.g., Balaam, Angels, Ancient World, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Lawless)

The false figures category of polemical rhetoric, at times, was refined further by New Testament authors through the selection of specific historical figures to replace the typological ones. Here, instead of relying upon general false figure types, an author would invoke a concrete, historical figure, as well as the traditions and legends which surrounded the figure, in an attempt to discredit the opponent. Almost invariably these figures (as seen in the New Testament) were ones drawn from the Old Testament and/or were the subject of (further) Jewish legend. We see the figures and traditions surrounding Jezebel (Rev 2:20), the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6, 15), Cain (1 John 3:12; Jude 11), Korah (Jude 11), Esau (Heb 12:16), and Jannes and Jambres (2 Tim 3:8) utilized by various epistle writers in an effort to discredit the respective opponents which thwarted them. Likewise, the author of 2 Peter invokes multiple Old Testament figures in working toward this same end. In 2:15-16 he invokes the figure of Balaam in order to further explicate how exactly the opponents "have gone astray."<sup>64</sup> According to the author, the figure of Balaam, along with the traditions surrounding him, is paradigmatically illustrative for the error of the opponents; they are following the "way of Balaam." Additionally, the "angels" (2:4), "the ancient world" (2:5), "Sodom and Gomorrah" (2:6), and "the lawless" (2:7) are Old Testament figures, both individual and collective, that represent God's past punishment of the wicked.<sup>65</sup> These Old Testament figures, as they are used here, are also "typological prophecies of the eschatological judgment. They

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<sup>64</sup> See also Jude 11 and Rev 2:14 where the figure of Balaam is employed in an attempt to denigrate an adversary. Based on these texts, Fornberg, *An Early Church*, 40 notes that Balaam "represents a common type of heretic" and "was regarded as an heretic *par excellence* at least in parts of Asia Minor."

<sup>65</sup> The author also provides counterexamples that confirm God's ability to rescue the godly. He notes the sparing of Noah (2:5) and Lot (2:7) in an effort to reassure the readers of God's coming deliverance for them. On the rhetorical moves being made in this section, see Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 83-4, 110-4.

foreshadow the doom of the wicked of the last days, among whom the false teachers and their followers are numbered.”<sup>66</sup> Ultimately, while the “false figures” and “Old Testament figures” forms of polemical rhetoric are quite similar, in that they both are intended to serve as typologies or paradigms for interpreting the character and/or actions of the opponents, the present category reaches further toward this end. Here, the author parallels the opponents not with a general false figure type, but with a specific and, often times, widely known heretical figure, a method of caricature and defamation known as *Ketzergeschichte*. Via *Ketzergeschichte* the author assigns a heretical trajectory to the given opponents that not only defames their current position but also disparages their entire past by retrofitting them into a normative heretical history. In short, the opponents are and always have been heretical types in line with the specific Old Testament figures and/or traditions noted.

In these numerous categories of polemical rhetoric, one sees that the author of 2 Peter employs some forms held in common with other New Testament writers and others that are unique to his own epistle. He has seemingly run the gambit of polemical rhetoric. However, the ultimate force of the rhetoric lies not in the individual categories that the author employs. Rather, it is found in the synergy that results from the heaping up of denigratory and/or defamatory terms, images, and figures.<sup>67</sup> Thus, while I have dedicated the majority of time and space to the content (i.e., forms) of the polemical charges, the issue of function still remains to be addressed. Though all the forms of polemical rhetoric have some functional commonality, in that they all are designed to caricature and/or denigrate the opponent, certain forms do have some distinct functional aspects to them. Therefore, I will turn to address the function of the polemical rhetoric in 2 Peter.

Yet, before moving on, a brief note on methodological intent is in order. In the next section, I will concentrate only on the socio-

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<sup>66</sup> Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 256.

<sup>67</sup> On the style of the author’s use of polemical rhetoric, especially in 2:10b-22, see Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 115.



rhetorical function of the polemical rhetoric.<sup>68</sup> I will attempt to understand how the polemical rhetoric deliberately functions within the rhetorical argumentation of the author and the social implications that stem from it.

As an aid in this effort, I will relate and highlight an interactionist perspective of deviance, drawn from the field of sociology.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> While I contend that this is the primary functional dimension of the rhetoric, I do not rule out other possible functions it may have. Also, I do not intend to undertake here a formal analysis of the rhetorical argumentation of 2 Peter in light of ancient Greco-Roman conventions of rhetoric. This has already been addressed quite effectively by Watson in his *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*. My analysis is rhetorical in a much more limited sense. I intend, simply, to examine how the author employs various forms of polemical rhetoric within the argumentation (i.e., attempt at persuasion) of the letter, as well as tracking and highlighting the social factors involved in and resulting from this effort.

<sup>69</sup> Some notable examples of NT scholarship where ideas from the sociology of deviance have been employed are Desjardins, "The Portrayal of the Dissidents," 89-102; Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Calling Jesus Names: The Social Value of Labels in Matthew* (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1988); *idem*, "Conflict in Luke-Acts: Labelling and Deviance Theory," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991) 97-122; Jack T. Sanders, *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, Deviants: The First One Hundred Years of Jewish-Christian Relations* (London: SCM, 1993); Helmut Mödritzer, *Stigma und Charisma im Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt. Zur Soziologie des Urchristentums*, NTOA 28 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1994); Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism, eds. William Scott Green and Calvin Goldscheider (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1994); Philip Richter, "Social-Scientific Criticism of the New Testament: An Appraisal and Extended Example," in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and David Tombs, JSNTSup 120 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) 266-309; John M. G. Barclay, "Deviance and Apostasy: Some Applications of Deviance Theory to First-Century Judaism and Christianity," in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context*, ed. Philip F. Esler (London: Routledge, 1995) 114-27; *idem*, "Who Was Considered an Apostate in the Jewish Diaspora?," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity*, eds. Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1998) 80-98; Lloyd Pietersen, "Despicable Deviants: Labelling Theory and the Polemic of the Pastorals," *Sociology of Religion* 58 (1997) 343-52; and Todd D. Still, *Conflict at Thessalonica: A Pauline Church and its Neighbours*, JSNTSup 183 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).